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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness, behavior, and role of the consultant as policy advisor is examined in light of three operating assumptions: (1) that educational organiztions are subject to politicization; (2) that the consultant's primary role is to assist in nonroutine, potentially controversial policy decisions; and (3) that the consultant must therefore know the political dynamics of policy-making. Section 1 addresses the political context, including factors contributing to politicization and the nature of problems for which organizations retain consultants. Section 2 concerns problems for the consultant arising from the "anarchy trap," or inherent limitations on manageability in an educational organization due to the diffuse structure of responsibilities and correspondingly weak feedback mechanisms. Accordingly, section 3 provides three choices of approach for the educational consultant: (1) accept the inevitabilities of the "anarchy trap" and restrict his/her role to researcher, catalyst, resource, or counselor; (2) attempt to redefine or clarify the organizational structure; (3) use the organizational ambiguities creatively to "go with the flow." Section 4 provides a four-phase model for policy decisions: "garbage can," negotiations, persuasion/legitimation, and bureaucratization. A flow chart is included. Section 5 summarizes the paper as a whole and assesses the implications of the four-phase mode. References are included. (TE)

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THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANCY IN THE CONTEXT OF POLICY FORMATION.

EA 016 477

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This chapter is concerned with examining the effectiveness, behaviour and role of the consultant called in to advise on policy formation in educational organisations.

It rests on the following assumptions:-

1. that educational organisations are becoming increasingly subject to politicisation, defined as "a state where individuals or groups are consistently scheming for an advantage, often in an opportunistic manner ... towards the achievement of personal or partisan (group) ends".(1)

2. that there is a trend of consultants becoming increasingly involved in providing some help in the development of policy positions in educational organisations, often at its interface with the environment. This consultancy is essentially concerned with the non-routine, non-programmed decision of potentially high visibility and high conflict.

3. that, since policy formation is inevitably a political process, the consultant must recognise he is working in a political environment, and accordingly develop a perspective of the political dynamics of the organisation; a view of the stages involved in the delivery of a policy; and skills of facilitation appropriate to this context.

The chapter attempts to explore the implications of the above drawing heavily on consultancy experience the author has had on projects developed by the Anglian Regional Management Centre with governments (local and central) and institutions in UK, Europe, North America, India and Latin America. Whilst the paper is written primarily from the standpoint of the external consultant, many of the conclusions will also apply to the consultant working in his own organisation. The chapter attempts to offer a framework for the development of the consultancy role in the above context.

1. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF CONSULTANCY ACTIVITIES IN EDUCATION

1.1 A series of factors, often externally induced, appear to be reinforcing the tendency to politicisation of institutional policy making. These may be simply stated as:

* increasing pressures on public expenditure as a result of economic problems in the western world, which in turn creates ...

* greater attention by external governmental policy matters to the way in which money is spent and accounted for within institutions, and what the short, mid and long term benefit and effect of the expenditure has been;

* greater questioning by employers of the relevance of the products of secondary and higher education institutions;

* the creation of ostensib ly more democratic structures in institutions often as a result of national legislation, which creates more constituencies (junior faculty, non-teaching staff, students); more expectations (at least early on!) that wider influences on policy formation are possible; more time being spent on decision-making by more people; and apparently more openness in decision-making. Creating such structures constitutes an invitation to use them for stating and defending policy and planning preferences - and differences;

* an erosion of confidence in the capacity of managers to manage in the context of extraordinarily difficult problems and environments, which may be expressed in distrust, disillusion, disbelief - and ultimately by 'opposition' movements, coalitions of interest against "the administration" etc.

These clearly create problems for educational administrators who may be unused to such pressures - hence the requests to external consultants.

1.2 Apart from these somewhat global tendencies, the educational consultant tends to receive invitations from client organisations who perceive themselves to have specific problems which may be more congenially resolved by the use of external assistance. The issues with which the author and his colleagues have been concerned in recent years includes, for example :-

* developing policies at state and institutional level towards institutional evaluation (externally and internally administered) and devising, testing and implementing appropriate instruments.

1.2 (continued)

* developing appropriate organisational structures and processes in teams of advisers/inspectors to meet the internal needs of the teams themselves and the external needs of institutions and government.

* developing a comprehensive policy portfolio for school systems faced with imminent contraction of enrolments (demand) or finance (supply).

* developing an university planning system for a third world government to ensure a balance between the needs of public accountability and strategic direction and institutional freedom.

* developing policies at institutional level for the merger of 6 colleges into a split campus institute of higher education: structure, academic policy, staffing.

* developing strategies for the reinvigoration of the administration of an old continental university.

Other colleagues in higher education, or performing advisory/inspectoral roles in various countries, will have been active on a variety of topics concerned with curriculum reform, personnel administration, resource development etc.

Such consultancies could be legitimately attempted through what might be called "administrative sciences/systems analysis" approaches. In this case, one would classically define the problem and its dimensions; analyse the causes; identify a series of desired outcomes and conditions; enumerate a series of eligible alternative solutions/options; evaluate the costs and benefits of each, (qualitatively and quantitatively); make a recommendation based on an optimum combination of options; implement; and subsequently evaluate the effectiveness of the decision in terms of the original objectives. This rationalist approach has been felt to be particularly appropriate to complex problems and organisations, and have often been quantitatively sophisticated.

However, on further reflection it is evident that the subjects of consultancy quoted above are all impregnated with substantial behavioural and political issues, and to adopt a strictly rationalist approach as a consultant would be of limited help to the organisations attempting to generate policies which were educationally desirable, financially viable and politically acceptable. Let us demonstrate the political tensions inherent in "rationalist" approaches :-

* the definition of desired outcomes calls into question the role of the institution in its particular environment and the visions, restrictions or opportunities which interested groups may wish to impose on the institution, are immediately activated;

1.2 (continued)

* the identification of alternative options or a selection of appropriate combinations implies that there are winners and losers - in terms of philosophical stances, particular courses of action, additional resources, less resources, or status and credibility;

* the attribution of costs and benefits gives infinite scope for misconception, different definition, and lack of common assumptions on measurement;

* monitoring performance can be regarded as hostile interference; or as an ill-informed "bureaucratic" attempt to retard alleged progress by worthy academics;

* evaluation itself is a well recognised means of promoting insecurity amongst the evaluated, and consequently various acts of non-compliance, smokescreening, and information concealment may result;

* the shifting of resources from one part of the institution to the other (consequent upon differential department growth possibilities in an overall zero-growth situation) produces all the usual responses related to the "survival of academic autonomy" etc.

1.3 Thus we may confidently assert that, if one of the purposes of consultancy is to help educational organisations confront and resolve problems, and to change elements of their practice, process or structure, "rational" approaches cannot cope alone. Similarly, in the case of large complex institutions, and certainly governments, it is debatable whether some more recent organisational development approaches (2) can cope. Many of these rely on extended small group arenas for the development of openness and trust. There may be a limit beyond which these approaches cannot go, and, in the case of some of the issues in 1.2, some contemporary problems are helping to define these limits. This is felt to be especially so as the spectre of steady state and contraction in westernised educational systems activates intergroup invalues, coalitions and conflict as never before. This would seem to constitute a case for the consultant to be competent in coping with the political realities of an assignment, as well as being technically competent in an area such as curriculum or personnel.

2. PROBLEMS FOR THE CONSULTANT ARISING FROM THE INHERENT NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

2.1 Consultancy activities in education are often very different from similar activities in other organisations. We have already referred to the political dimension, but various writers draw attention to other significant dimensions. Cohen and March (3) argue persuasively that institutions reveal distinct tendencies of limited manageability or "organised anarchy". This means that there are a series of factors which, operating singly or together, militate against the capability of management to develop, legitimise and review its policies in a highly systematic manner, for example :-

* goals in educational organisations are generally very ambiguous, in the sense that they are rarely overt, may be mutually conflicting, and are generally incapable of being converted into operational criteria for planning or evaluation.

* it is rarely possible to be very precise about the relationships between institutional goals (ends) and processes, structures, technologies and resources (means). This is evident in current debates on resource allocation (where marginal resources should be directed) and in discussions on the learning gain from different combinations of teaching methods.

* traditionally, departments and teachers (and researchers in higher education) tend to have considerable autonomy, and "central" management has very few sanctions which may be effectively used. "Academic freedom" thus limits the extent of coherent policy implementation, interdepartmental activity and swift changes in course structures or teaching methods.

* most institutions (as distinct from agencies of government) tend to be led by part-time managers, whose major interests and satisfactions lie in teaching or research. This inevitably creates an issue of how much time and energy can be devoted to problem resolution, and how much commitment can be generated.

* institutions and government agencies have generally experienced very weak market feedback mechanisms, relating to, for example, the quality of performance of alumni in subsequent career stages (primary children in secondary education; graduates in industry etc.). We have recently observed tendencies in the western world to act on the input side as a result of contracting enrolments, but the time scale of collecting evaluation and feedback and using it for resource allocation and redeployment is long, and the relevant decision-making systems may often be formally unconnected.

2.1 (continued)

* commitment to a particular institution - and hence interdisciplinary or administrative work on its behalf - may be lessened by the scholar's professional commitment to in-depth study, and the fact that rewards (especially in higher education) are not necessarily based on devotion to committee-work, high risk-taking or administrative chores.

* educational organisations are often characterised by using planning processes as cosmetics for external consumption rather than serious attempts to move institutions in particular directions. This ambiguity in planning structures and processes is exacerbated by diffused responsibility.

The implications of the above for the educational consultant are profound. Enderud (4) uses the term "anarchy trap" to describe this constellation of factors, and if the portrayal is accurate, it goes a long way to explain why consultants hired to secure changes in direction and velocity in curriculum structures, roles organisations, administrative or financial procedures, are markedly unsuccessful. The following points are worthy of especial note :-

* the educational consultant finds himself in the centre of a fascinating dilemma which the client organisation and its educationalists have created: they dislike meetings, yet must attend them/generate them to preserve their interests, positions and influence; they do not wish to invest too much time on policy and planning, yet are unwilling to trust others; they dislike being constrained by a policy framework, yet need the stability which policies afford to provide a framework in which to exercise personal discretion; they distrust power-centres beyond their control or understanding, yet yearn for a "godfather" on whom they can rely to sort out difficult issues; they reject bureaucracy, yet demand the information, participation and services which create educational bureaucracies.

* He thus enters an organisation which basically resents him, hopes he will get them off a particular hook, but will happily condemn his approach, style and conclusions given half a chance! He will be asking them to give him part of their precious time and commitment for interviews or meetings, the purposes of which may not be altogether clear or agreeable, and may be perceived to be closely associated with the evil designs of senior management.

* the achievement of effective policy changes is clearly not merely a matter of the consultant (and his manager counterpart) being logical and highly rational. The environment may not be highly rational, and other strategies are necessary.

2.1 (continued)

* the achievement of policy decisions which have any political legitimacy is likely to be a slow and problematic process, and the consultant or client who expects speedy poultices and panaceas to apply to the body corporate will be disappointed. The suspicious environment will likely be wary of grand strategies, and the process of development of successful policies may be typified by a succession of partial, short range compromises embodying policy statements, values and criteria which have to be reinforced time and time again before a stable conventional wisdom is established.

* given environmental uncertainties of both a political and economic nature, policy decisions may be more concerned with establishing positions at the margin, consistent with a very broad loose framework of agreement, rather than grand fixed strategies. This in turn, facilitates, continuing readjustment to changes.

* the implication of the above is that the consultant ideally needs to be about for a considerable time to be of most use to the organisation in the generation of sound policies and needs to invest much time and energy. This may not be possible for many reasons concerned with finance, exposure, and political tactics. It follows that consultants such as government inspectors and advisers and those who have the longevity of sponsored contracts (e.g. in overseas development projects) tend to have more of a chance to cope with the variables discussed.

* the diffusion of responsibility referred to can produce fascinating problems for the consultant as to who his client really is. This really gets confusing when sponsors and middleman facilitators have greatly assisted in establishing linkages between client and consultant. In one case in which the author was involved, in a developing country, we had the central government of the developing country, a state administration, (who were both involved in defining the problem, its parameters, and giving the project official legitimacy); a university institute (the counterpart institution on which research and training programmes were bases, and whose faculty were being developed as a formal element in the project); principals of polytechnic institutes who were the main 'focus of field activities and the focus of management development; plus two sponsoring agencies (one governmental), each with regional offices (who provided the bulk of the funds). This rather long sentence gives a measure of the inherent complexity, and whilst it is a luxuriant example, it does indicate the necessity of being quite clear who one's primary and secondary clients are, and precisely what the formal and informal contracts and expectations are with each group.

In conclusion therefore, the consultant needs to be able to cope with considerable ambiguity if he is in the business of assisting on policy, and this, allied with the political context, provides a colossal challenge to the consultant.

3. CHOICES OF APPROACH FOR THE EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

Let us assume that an educational consultant has recognised that the context in which he finds himself is riddled with pressure group activity, suspicion of the managers by the managed, and has considerable ambiguity of purpose and expectation. He has now to decide how best to operate in this "organised anarchy", for if he is expected to assist in the development of an effective policy response to a problem, it has got to"stick." How can he develop a policy which as a chance of "sticking"? How can he develop relationships so that ideas and values are translated into reality? This is clearly a matter of his values and style as a consultant, and his response to the fact of the anarchy is his first major decision. There would appear to be three alternative approaches which we shall now examine :-

3.1 Accept the inevitabilities of the "anarchy trap". In this case he may go home at the earliest opportunity, (and good luck to him: at least he is unlikely to damage his reputation significantly!). Alternatively, he may define his role in one or more of the following ways :- (5)

* he may act as a researcher, by helping to evaluate the status quo, analyse the nature of the problem, and may be demonstrate possible avenues of development arising from his collection of data.

* he may act as a catalyst, by stimulating interest in given lines of development, saying slightly outrageous things which people in the organisation dare not say; or demonstrating the necessity for change in more subtle ways.

* he may act as a resource, by making available his knowledge of the incidence of the problem elsewhere, and the responses which those other educational organisations have made. He may also comment on why others' experiences have been suffessful or unsuccessful, and why this may be so.

* he may decide that the best he can do in the "anarchy trap" is to act as a counsellor, especially to his principal client. This may be a low key mirror activity where he encourages his client to identify the causes of problems and likely solutions for himself. He may pick up vibrations on various dimensions of the problem from all levels in the organisation and feed them back, appropiately classified, catalogued and interpreted, to the principal client.

It should be emphasised that much good can come out of these roles, and, indeed, given the constraints on time and energy, these may be the most useful and effective in the particular circumstances, though they may be limited in the context of the original expectation of the client, and the size of the problem.

3.2 Attempt to help the client "straighten out" the anarchy in a way relevant to the problem.

* The consultant, either because of his own training and disposition, or because of pressures from a client organisation, may very well assume a role of rationalist and logician, pushing the institution towards redefining its goals in relation to a particular phenomenon, in very precise and detailed ways. If these are not capable of being operationalised, he will have achieved at best greater understanding amongst the group, or at worst, have consumed considerable time and energy in producing a chimera.

* he may be tempted to advocate increases in the degree of structure and formality in the organisation, through organisational charts, regulations, controls, procedures etc. This is clearly associated with hierarchical coercion, and is unlikely to sort out most problems per se, because of pressure on administrators, non-compliance, shortage of sanctions to enforce compliance etc.

* he may encourage the hierarchy to apply radical shocks to the system to enforce compliance with a policy - control of monies for activities closely linked to staff job satisfaction; withdrawal of privileges and conventional rights to, for example, research time in higher education. This tactic may be successful in the short term, but clearly does little to develop an esprit de corps in the organisation, and requires a strong coalition of internal interests and external threats to make it work.

Thus, it would appear that a stance designed to "sort out" or "tidy up" a situation may not be all that fruitful if he pursues an essentially "rationalist" approach.

3.3 Attempt to operate in a manner which recognises the existence of the ambiguities, but uses them positively as sources of creativity in the development of policy solutions. If this course is followed, it would seem to require a fusion of the explicit elements of Lindblom's "Theory of Muddling Through",(6) and Enderud's "Four Phase Model" (7). The assumptions would seem to be that :-

* any consulting process which attempts to create a massive, apocalyptic and fundamental re-think and re-casting of the nature of the institution and a considerable switching of resources across the board over a short time scale is most unlikely to succeed. A process which encourages and facilitates shifts at the margin on a continuing and incremental basis is likely to succeed, particularly if the institution is learning and developing its confidence in tackling problems as they arise.

3.3 (continued)

* the opportunity must therefore be seized within the process to ensure that relatively small-scale changes have maximum pay-off in psychological impact and practical effect, particularly to undermine historical relics;

* each relatively small-scale change should be approached via a decision making process which uses the ambiguity rather than is used by it. The consultant, together with the administrator must therefore be highly effective in the management of these small-scale changes since these create a pattern for the future;

* successful consultants will need to create internal commitment to the means of achieving an end, without necessarily having widespread agreement to the end itself, which is likely to be the subject of value differences;

* successful consultancy will be more opportunist than cyclical in its timing and incidence.

* such a consultancy process may call for more political/behavioural skills than technical skills (and we do not imply Machiavellianism, or a Nixonian "dirty-tricks department", rather enhanced sensitivities to the realities of others' beliefs, preferences and modes of action);

* a firm and stable coalition needs to exist in the organisation over the period of the genesis and implementation of the policy, consisting of key groups who need incentives to collaborate, which may be provided by the administration. Furthermore, they must be determined to use the formal structure to effect their desired changes, but in ways best suited to their particular purpose.

These assumptions reinforce the view that consultants in the field of policy development need to be continually accessible to the organisation over a moderately long period.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF POLICY DECISIONS

4.1 Because of the uncertainties involved in the environment in which the consultant operates, it can be contended that he needs to be particularly aware of the stages involved in the genesis of policy decisions. This is important for the following reasons :-

* a consultant may be invited to assist an organisation at any time: when the full realisation of the difficulties in a problem has dawned on senior administrators; when an organisation feels itself to be unable to generate consensus because of political infighting; when it perceives itself to be deficient in technical knowledge or analytical capability, or when it wishes to receive an external validating view of a proposed policy before implementation. Each of these situations is quite different, and the roles which a consultant might effectively play will also vary with the situation. Thus, he has to know where he is in the chronology of the policy decision.

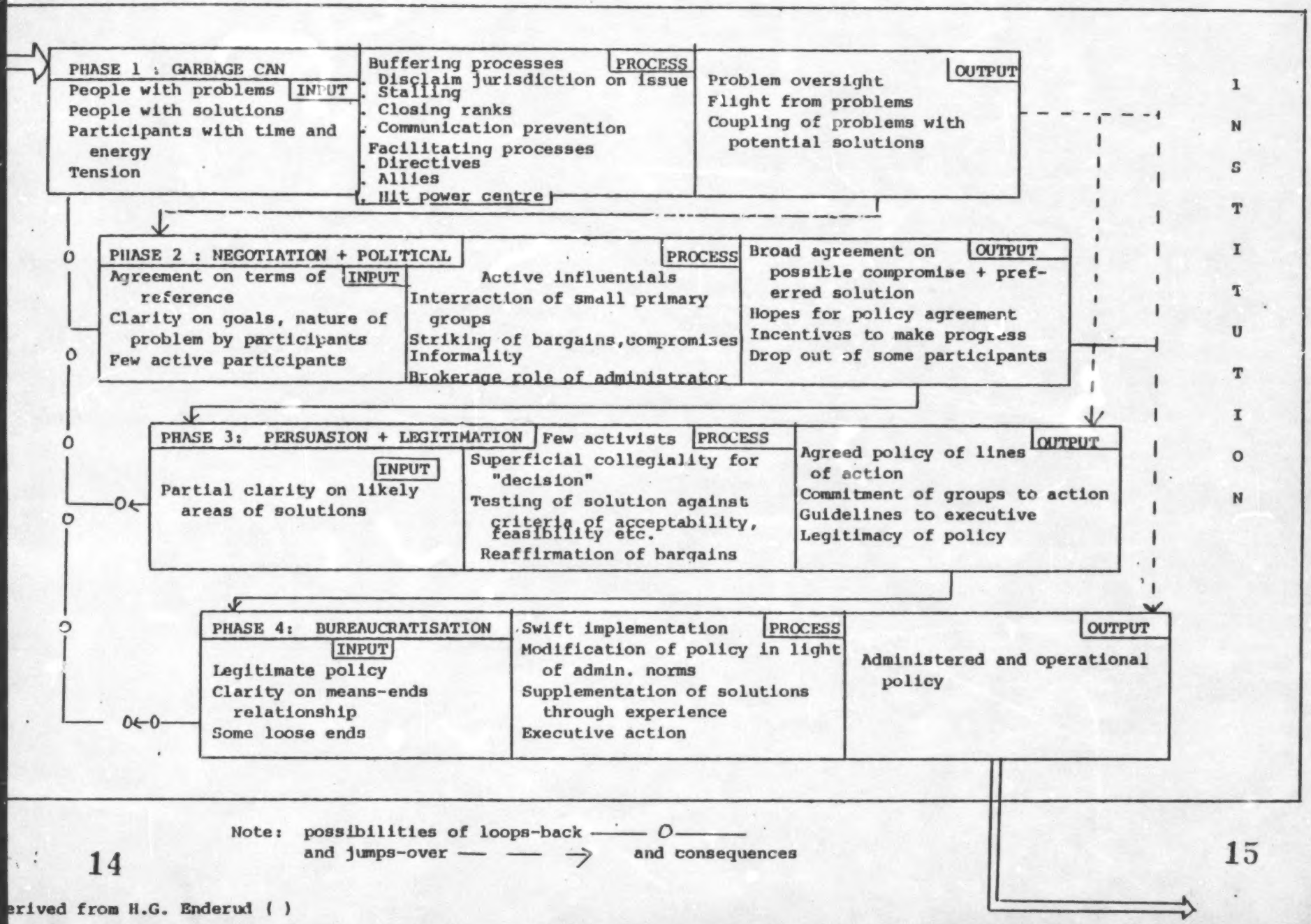
* a sense of historical perspective will act as a necessary brake on a consultant, who might otherwise act too swiftly in political terms, even though in terms of technical expertise, he may be very sound. This sensitivity should determine when and how this substantive expertise should be contributed.

* where the consultant enters the fray may well determine what strategies are available or not available, what skills are relevant or irrelevant; and what political options are open.

4.2 A most helpful model in this respect is the "Four Phase Model" developed by Enderud. This penetrating work was based on an analysis of a series of major policy issues in a Danish university, encompassing a reorganisation of the university; planning a major curriculum revision: and a student retrial case. From this, Enderud concluded that there were four phases of policy formation present in each case. These are indicated in Figure 1. The author has applied the model to a further series of policy formation cases, including school closures in a US school district [8], establishing plans for institutional mergers between Swiss universities [9] and developing rationalisation strategies within universities in UK [10]. It appears that the model is a most potent analytical tool, which gives considerable guidance to managers and consultants on the dynamics of policy formation.

4.3 What should be specifically noted about this model for the educational consultant?

FIGURE 1 : A FOUR PHASE POLITICAL SYSTEMS MODEL OF POLICY FORMATION



Note: possibilities of loops-back ——— O ———
and jumps-over — — → and consequences

erived from H.G. Enderud ( )

4.3 (continued)

* the sequence is based on a gradual evolution of the planning decision, to ensure that there is a proper allowance for an essentially highly ambiguous period (Phase 1); a political period (Phase 2); a collegial period (Phase 3); and an implementation/executive period (Phase 4). To miss any Phase, or to allow insufficient time for it, is to invite problems subsequently, since one may find that, for example, the wrong participants have been coupled (Phase 1); or that one comes to Phase 4 without having tested a key group's support of the policy proposition. This "jump-over" of a phase may well create the necessity of a "loop-back" - if one is in Phase 4 which is clearly not working, a return to Phase 1 may be necessary to redefine the problem, or to Phase 2 to build a workable coalition of interests; or to Phase 3 to use additional validation criteria in respect of the proposal. The "loop-back" may be a decision of the sensitive consultant or administrator who realises the necessary foundations have not been laid: on the other hand, (and less desirably!) it may be forced on him by hostile groups who are just not happy with having a possibly ill-conceived and partially tested decision thrust upon them;

* phases may vary considerably in length and intensity according to the political dynamics of the organisation, and the problem perceived by external agencies.

* whilst one may have a specific policy strategy in mind to cope with a series of real or perceived problems, one does not start by exposing this as the ultimate in human experience within the 4-phase model! On the contrary, the starting point is a close definition of the diminsions of the problem to which one's proposal is related in terms which (a) appeal to people from various positions on the power spectrum and (b) is internally consistent with any preferred solution one may have. The consultant then has the considerable advantage of being one who is in the business of identifying problems rather than indiscriminately peddling bright ideas which may be perceived as irrelevant. Policy consultancy in this context thus has a very strong element of problem diagnosis;

* the consultant has a significant role of creating communication links and dialogues between parties who may have the capability of developing perspectives on a planning problem. They may be part of some formal structure or key members of an informal group who nevertheless have something positive to offer. Not all of these people need necessarily figure, or wish to figure, in each phase. (Really key figures - whose single opinion may be a determining factor - may only appear in Phases 1 and 2, leaving the details to mere mortals!). At its most sophisticated, the consultant's role involves coalition building between potentially like-minded groups.

4.3 (continued)

* the proposal itself has the opportunity of evolving through the phases not only as an increasingly complex and detailed guide to subsequent action but as an increasingly acceptable political, educational and resource package. Consequently, the model is one which facilitates close attention to task and process concurrently - one of the perpetual problems of organisational theorists. practitioners, and consultants.

* the consultant will recognise that there are many arenas in which action in any of the 4 phases can take place. Enderud indeed makes the point that the formal Phase 3 which gives ostensible legitimacy to the policy proposal or document is likely to be the emptiest in terms of real argument and contribution. Other vehicles have therefore to be devised - ones which are appropriate to the needs of the particular phase concerned; ones which make most sense to the participants one is trying to involve (so that they are "playing at home"); and ones which take the pressure off the administrator or consultant. Those left "holding the baby" of a particular problem or specific solution are easily deserted when hard choices are needed. Using the 4-phase processes to share the ownership of problem or solution with others therefore is important. Arenas which may be used successfully by the consultant include private meetings; the judicious use of the telephone; golf club and restaurant; seminars and workshops; weekend retreats; joint consultative procedures; formal committee meetings; and various branches of the media.

* associated with this is the question of openness. It is appreciated that the relationship between consultant and client is a very delicate and confidential one, and the consultant has to respect this, otherwise the relationship is undermined. However, in discussions which the consultant must have with other people and groups, he clearly has a role of selective information dissemination in order to build up a climate of trust and confidence that progress can be made in the resolution of problems. Consequently, administrators and consultants jointly need to be quite open on their information base, planning assumptions etc. Apocalyptic announcements of impending change/policies are no substitute for gradualism. If one of the functions of the consultant is to help generate an agreed policy, it is clearly necessary to build a broad based coalition of support across an organisation, and this cannot be done without a high level of shared information throughout the phases.

5. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 4-PHASE MODEL FOR THE ROLE OF THE CONSULTANTS

5.1 We need to define the repertoire of roles which the consultant will need to play to be helpful to the client organisation. It is perhaps important for him to :-

* recognise that different roles are relevant in different phases;
* recognise which phase he is in;
* recognise when to move from one to another, and have the ability to do it smoothly;
* have the confidence and competence to play these roles.

5.2 Let us summarise what competencies seem to be required of the consultant to perform effectively in policy formation alongside the administrator :-

Phase I
- ability to define a problem; and to analyse its various dimensions.
- ability to identify persons and groups who have something to contribute to policy formation, especially the key influentials; and to plot a political map of the organisation.
- ability to act as a catalyst to bring these together at a time and in a manner likely to make progress;
- ability to buffer linkages which may be unproductive in the policy decision.

Phase II
- ability to assist participants to clarify dimensions of the problem, and their own goals and perceptions in the context of the problem;
- ability to avoid being too precise and prescriptive too soon;
- ability to interpret one group to another, to convey appropriate information, and to summarise positions reached;
- ability to invent bargains, compromises and incentives (11), and to facilitate alliances between groups to prevent breakdowns and deadlocks;
- ability to devise stimulating ideas to insert unobtrusively into what may be an intellectually arid arena.

Phase III - ability to devise and use appropriate feasibility tests for preferred course of action;

- ability to secure covert agreement of groups before legitimising public meeting takes place;

- ability to create confidence in the capability of the "system" to deliver bargains, and to manage the decision effectively, thus securing commitment.

Phase IV - ability to help the administrator implement swiftly;

if needed - ability to assist the administrator convert what may be a general decision into something which may be effectively administered.

5.3 What does the above discussion tell us about the tactics of the decision? Enderud's analysis reveals the following activities as critical :-

* investing considerable time in the drudgery of information collection, document drafting, telephone conversations, attendance at meetings, etc.;

* writing position papers and records of meetings not as sterile minutes, but as a formulation of consensus agreements as a springboard to the next set of discussions;

* facilitating the participation of opposition groups. Creating a "win-lose" situation, or excluding people from dialogues is likely to be politically counter-productive;

* maintaining a low profile and image of neutrality.

* posturing and displaying public importance is of less significance than a successful outcome;

* creating a situation where others make the public declarations and propositions.

5.4 The range of roles described above is clearly in a completely different category from those described in 3.1 and 3.2. The roles implied in the 4-phase model are very much those of the full-blown change agent - a version of consultancy characterised by high risk and requiring a high level of professional competence.

5.5 Given the political nature of much of policy formation, the consultant clearly needs to understand the nature of the political map of the organisation. To attempt to generate policies, however technical in scope, without knowing the configuration of pressures is somewhat naive, to say the least. Pressure groups perceive proposed policy changes in quite different ways because of their particular orientations and vested interests, and this perhaps should be regarded by the consultant as natural rather than sinister.

5.5 (continued)

The fact that some groups are activated to take a dim view of a proposal does not mean that they are "baddies": it does mean that their sensitivities have been assailed, and that conditions have to be created for them to feel able to assent positively to a proposal. It is here that the consultant's role in disseminating information, and assisting his client to devise incentives and trade-offs becomes critical. He has the advantage of being potentially more dispassionate than the client who is normally prejudiced in political terms.

Many instruments exist for undertaking political mapping of an educational institution. Brosan (12) extending an analysis of Cohen and March has produced a fascinating typology of group profiles in a polytechnic, whilst Davies (13) has developed an instrument used in mapping pressure group characteristics in a US school district. Through such a mapping, the consultant is in a much better position to use the right arenas for discussion; encourage fruitful dialogues; disseminate information effectively; and shape policy recommendations to the best effect.

5.6 At several points in the chapter so far, we have referred to the critical nature of the relationship between the consultant and the client. Other chapters in this book explore the question in greater detail. However, it is apparent that if policy is the focus of consultation, the stakes for the client are high. If the style and form of consultation is that described in3.1 or 3.2, relations need to be fairly close. However, if the style envisaged is that described in 4, then relations need to be quite intimate, since the senior administrator or politician who is the client and the consultant are both significant change agents, but with different orientations. Misconceptions on either side as to the role of the consultant and his legitimate range of activities can clearly lead to disaster - and have!

CONCLUSION

The range of problems confronting educational organisations seems likely to increase, given shortages of finance, demographic changes and volatile pressure groups of different kinds. Many of these problems require sophisticated portfolios of policies which require time and energy to develop, which may be beyond the capacity of hard pressed administrators or politicians. Expectations of external advisers may thus be high, - often too high. The reasons for these discrepancies between expectation and performance may be because of the lack of balance between technical and process expertise on behalf of the consultant. It may also be because the consultant has not developed a framework for the political dynamics of the exercise. Finally, it may be because, whilst there are training programmes for administrators, the particular roles and skills implicit in consultancy (as outlined in paragraph 5.2) are neglected. Paragraph 5.2, in fact, may be a skeleton training programme! However, whether there are the quality and quantity of educational consultants about to perform effectively in policy formation, is debatable at present.

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